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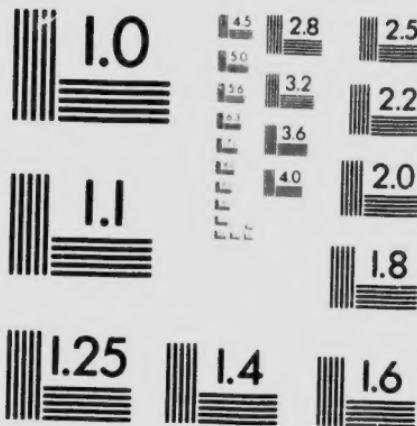


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CIRCULAR LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

THE CLERGY

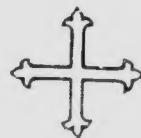
OF THE

DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND TIMOTHY CASEY, D.D.

Bishop of Saint John.



ST. JOHN, N. B.

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CIRCULAR LETTER
OF
THE BISHOP OF SAINT JOHN
TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE.

DEAR REVEREND FATHERS :

To re-establish all things in Christ — what wisdom and zeal on the part of Pope Pius in making this inspired dictum the watch-word and the motto of his reign ! Far greater evils than those of the present days were bearing down on humanity and threatening its destruction when the Apostle of the Gentiles first proclaimed this to be the will of God. The first chapter of the Apostle to the Romans shows the fearful state of degradation — “the depraved sense” — to which even the philosophers of the pagan world were delivered over. And we can thence conclude that there was scarcely an idea of virtue left among the masses of the people. Such was the state of the world when Christ our Lord appeared to pay its ransom with His blood.

He took the handwriting that was against us and nailed it to His cross. Then was the justice of God appeased, the sentence of death against mankind cancelled, the right to heaven and the means to attain it

restored, and men rejoiced in the liberty of the children of God. Thus men began to recognize the truth, that we all came from Him as our beginning and must return to Him as our end. By an easy and natural process of reason our common brotherhood became evident, and thus our mutual rights and duties were made manifest. As these sane and Christian principles were gradually developed and propagated, the purposes and character of men were changed and elevated, and this renewal soon worked on society and in the form of Christian civilization restored all things in Christ.

We are far away in time and space from the Redemption, but we are fully aware that its power is undiminished and its benefits unending. "I came to save that which was lost," said the Redeemer of men. It was the human race that was lost, and, therefore, in the designs of God, as long as the generation of men lasts, the power and graces of the Redemption are applicable to them. But this power and these graces were committed in their entirety to the Church, since her mission our Lord identified with His own, and indeed considered it the continuation of His, Himself present and acting through her: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." "Go teach all nations, baptizing them * * * * And behold I am with you all days." Hence when "truths are diminished among men," when the decadence of the religious spirit in the world rends the heart with grief, how consoling to learn that the watchword of our admirable Pontiff is not different from that conceived in the counsels of God, and recorded by the Apostle two thousand years ago—"to restore all things in Christ."

However evil the days in which we live, they are far superior to those of Saint Paul when he first proclaimed this consoling truth to the world, and looking

back we can see that its fulfilment has been effected. It now comes to us as an inspired oracle renewed, and we cannot withhold our confidence in the divine power and goodness for its second realization.

To this happy end what means could be more effective than that adopted by Pope Pius in his Letter on the Catechism? It is not different from that adopted by the Council of Trent four hundred years ago, when it struck the evils of the times at the root, prescribing instruction for the people, and in particular for the young and the ignorant much along the lines of the Encyclical before us. How striking to the sense of our responsibility are the words of that wise Pontiff, Benedict XIV., which the Holy Father brings right home to us by making them applicable to our times : "This we asservate : that the majority of those who are condemned to eternal punishment fall into the everlasting misfortune through ignorance of those mysteries of the faith which must be known and believed by all who belong to the elect."

Here we are brought officially face to face with the root of the evil that is dragging men to perdition, viz. : ignorance of the things they are bound to know and to believe. Nor are we left in the dark as to where the responsibility lies for the remedy — it is on you, Beloved, and on me conjointly with the Supreme Pontiff. You have made your course of theology, or divine law, you have primed yourselves with the doctrine and precepts that Christ made known to men, you have had your early labors sanctified and made prolific by the sacred unction of the priesthood, and it is now only necessary for you to co-operate with divine grace and your talents and attainments to fulfil the counsels of God : "Labia sacerdotis custodian scientiam, et legem requirant ex ore ejus."

Although God willed to restore all things in Christ, yet He would not, and did not, interfere with the freedom of will with which He had endowed man in the beginning, and it is among the divine counsels that some consequences of the original fall should remain in certain weakness of the will and inclinations to evil. It is abuse of the free will, the neglect of the graces of redemption, and the following of the wisdom of the flesh, that have brought on the evil days that the Holy Father deplores, and that laid open to so many men the way to perdition. Recognizing the *perpetuity* of the power and benefits of the redemption, the Pope commands us with fulness of Apostolic authority to spend ourselves in the employment of the very means that once saved a fallen world from far greater evils than those which now afflict us, and re-established all things in Christ. It is as if the divine command were given us now through the admirable head of the Christian religion : "Going, *teach* all nations * * * Preach the Gospel to every creature."

The sovereign merits and utility of catechetical instruction are not unknown to you, albeit it is void of pomp and human applause ; the duty of devoting yourselves to imparting it to all your people is brought home to you now by Apostolic command. Nor does the apparent simplicity of the Catechism give any assurance of our being able to fulfil this important duty without careful study and meditation. The Pope warns us against entertaining any such idea, and against attempting to perform this sacred duty superficially, assuring us it is more difficult to fulfil the office of the Catechist properly than that of the ornate preacher, that we should explain and illustrate the principles of religion by examples, comparisons and parables taken from Scripture, Church history and the lives of the

Saints. He points out how valuable assistance we can get from the "Catechism of the Council of Trent."

The Pontiff clearly marks the distinction between the ordinary explanation of the Gospel, or the homily, and catechetical instruction ; and while commanding the one, he orders that the other be not neglected, while the children must have a whole hour of instruction apart for themselves. Rightly do we understand him commanding us to spend ourselves for he leaves us no choice but to co-operate with him in the divine work of restoring all things in Christ. He imposes the obligation, or rather enforces it as it has already long existed, of explaining the Gospel on Sundays and feast days ; and in addition commands that a catechetical instruction be given to the people, apart from that of the children, at a convenient hour, likewise on Sundays and feast days, a half hour amply sufficing for the one to the people, while a whole hour must be given to the children by order of the Pontiff. Where the people are accustomed to re-assemble for evening devotions, the matter becomes simple — the homily for the Mass, the children at their usual hour, and the general catechetical instruction in the evening.

Where it is not possible to re-assemble the people may we not, relying on the goodness of heart of the Holy Father, venture to hope that, owing to this impossibility, we can please him by giving the explanation of the Gospel on one Sunday and the instruction on the Catechism on the following, and thus continue to alternate ? And in all cases the whole course of the Catechism must be completed at the end of four years. Thus one-fourth part of the Catechism must be completed each year.

There remains only a word to say concerning the preparation of the children for their First Communion

and Confirmation, which the Pope has made an object of special solicitude. It is a pleasure to be able to say that the work has been well done generally in these parts; but the anxiety of the Pontiff invites us to arouse ourselves to still greater zeal in regard to this most interesting portion of our charge, and to see that not one of these precious little ones should ever lose the choicest gift of God — his faith — through want of proper explanation of it on our part.

To give the greater authority to all these directions, it is judged well to add the very rules prescribed by the Holy Father himself:

“We, therefore, do by our supreme authority enact and strictly ordain that in all the dioceses the following precepts be observed :

I. On every Sunday and feast day, none excepted, all parish priests, and, generally speaking, all those who have care of souls, shall throughout the year, with the text of the Catechism, instruct for the space of an hour the young of both sexes in what they must believe and do to be saved.

II. They shall at stated times during the year prepare boys and girls by continued instruction lasting several days to receive the Sacraments of Penance and Confirmation.

III. Every day in Lent, and, if necessary, on other days after the feast of Easter, they shall likewise by suitable instructions and reflections most carefully prepare boys and girls to receive their first Communion in a holy manner.

IV. In each parish the Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine is to be canonically instituted. Through this Confraternity the parish priests, especially

in places where there is a scarcity of priests, will find valuable helpers for catechetical instruction in pious lay persons who will lend their aid to this holy and salutary work, both from a zeal for the glory of God and as a means of gaining the numerous indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs.

V. In . . . towns . . . let religious classes be founded to instruct in the truths of faith and in the practice of Christian life the young people who frequent the public schools from which all religious teaching is banned.

VI. In consideration of the fact that in these days adults not less than the young stand in need of religious instruction, all parish priests and others having the care of souls, shall in addition to the usual homily on the Gospel to be delivered at the Parochial Mass on all days of obligation, explain the Catechism for the faithful in an easy style suited to the intelligence of their hearers, at such time of the day as they may deem most convenient for the people, but not during the hour in which the children are taught. In this instruction they are to make use of the Catechism of the Council of Trent; and they are to divide the matter in such a way as within the space of four years to treat of the Apostles' Creed, the Sacraments, the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer and the Precepts of the Church.

This, Venerable Brothers, we do prescribe and command by virtue of the Apostolic authority."

The Holy See has at different times protested against a custom of leaving the Tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament without a veil. The last decree coming the 1st of July, 1904, is to be faithfully observed in all the Churches and Chapels of the diocese. The question was asked : "Can we follow the custom of not

placing a veil over the Tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved?"

The Sacred Congregation of Rites gave the following answer: "Negatively, and the Roman Ritual and decrees must be obeyed."

Your attention is again brought to the necessity of using candles made of wax in the service of the Altar. The law requires that the candles should be of bees' wax "in maxima parte." Interpreters are quite unanimous in holding that this means there should be sixty-five per cent. of bees' wax in the composition of the candles. This applies particularly to the candles required for Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; the paschal candle also should contain sixty-five per cent. of bees' wax, while twenty-five per cent. will suffice for the other candles used on the Altar.

The number prescribed for Mass is, as you know, two, and for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament ten at least of the wax in maxima parte. Any remaining number desired may be of the lesser proportion of wax.

As you are already aware the obligation of saying the beads on those who were unable to hear Mass the suppressed Holy Days — the Feast of the Annunciation, Ascension Thursday, Corpus Christi, and the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, was removed by the Holy See last year, so that the proper celebration of these Feasts is left to the best devotion of the faithful.

The regulations for Lent will be the same as last year.

Accept, Reverend dear Fathers, the expression of my devotion in Christ.

A. W. MEAHAN,
Secretary.

† T. CASEY,
Bishop of St. John.

Given at Saint John, February 11th, 1906.

